



[Paulo Freire, 1921-1997](#)

## Pedagogy is the Revolutionary Instrument

*“While the problem of humanization has always, from an axiological [**Axiology: The philosophical study of value**] point of view, been humankind's central problem, it now takes on the character of an inescapable concern. Concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility, but as an historical reality. And as an individual perceives the extent of dehumanization, he or she may ask if humanization is a viable possibility. Within history in concrete, objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of their incompleteness.*

*“But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression,*

*and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity.”*

Thus begins Chapter 1 of Paul Freire’s masterpiece, “The Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (attached).

This “Basics” course does not explicitly introduce any so-called “tools of analysis”, or “dialectical materialism”. Such things are not specifically dealt with until the CU course on [Philosophy and Religion](#). But it is not the case that there is no philosophy in the “Basics” course. It starts right here at the beginning, with Paulo Freire, and it is very profound and very advanced.

Although he never professes to be exclusively a Marxist, Paulo Freire is from the start of this book advocating the recovery of lost humanity, which is the fundamental intention of Karl Marx’s master-work, “Capital”.

Marx, by the way, was not a “dialectical materialist”, or at least, not in the commonplace or vulgarised meaning of that term. Marx’s understanding of the dialectical relationship between the human subject and the objective material world corresponded exactly to the following two paragraphs by Freire, from page 6 of the attached booklet:

*“... **one cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity.** Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized. The separation of objectivity from subjectivity, the denial of the latter when analyzing reality or acting upon it, is objectivism. On the other hand, the denial of objectivity in analysis or action, resulting in a subjectivism which leads to*

*solipsistic positions, denies action itself by denying objective reality. Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism is propounded here, but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship.*

*“To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naive and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: a world without people. This objectivistic position is as ingenuous as that of subjectivism, which postulates people without a world. World and human beings do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction. Man does not espouse such a dichotomy; nor does any other critical, realistic thinker. What Marx criticized and scientifically destroyed was not subjectivity, but subjectivism and psychologism. Just as objective social reality exists not by chance, but as the product of human action, so it is not transformed by chance. If humankind produce social reality (which in the "inversion of the praxis" turns back upon them and conditions them), then transforming that reality is an historical task, a task for humanity.”*

These paragraphs assert that there is **no priority of the objective or material world over the subjective human consciousness.**

Freire is highly preoccupied with the subject-object relationship, and insists “that the concrete situation which begets oppression must be transformed” (p.5). But the people’s vocation is humanisation, says Freire. Transforming social reality is an historical task – a task for humanity as the subjective, creative agent of its own history.

This is the first item of business that we have before us as human beings, and our *“only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy.”*

The latter phrase comes from the final paragraphs of Chapter 1 of “The Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, which are here given in full:

*“The struggle begins with men's recognition that they have been destroyed. Propaganda, management, manipulation - all arms of domination - cannot be the instruments of their rehumanization. The only effective instrument is a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed. In a humanizing pedagogy the method ceases to be an instrument by which the teachers (in this instance, the revolutionary leadership) can manipulate the students (in this instance, the oppressed), because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves.”*

***‘The method is, in fact, the external form of consciousness manifest in acts, which takes on the fundamental property of consciousness - its intentionality. The essence of consciousness is being with the world, and this behavior is permanent and unavoidable. Accordingly consciousness is in essence a 'way towards' something apart from itself outside itself, which surrounds it and which it apprehends by means of its ideational capacity. Consciousness is thus by definition a method, in the most general sense of the word. [Alvaro Vieira Pinto, from a work in preparation on the philosophy of science.]’***

*“A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement.”*

Not only does this explain the basis upon which the entire Communist University project been built. It is also a fully-worked-out manual for day-to-day revolutionary practice. It tells you, directly, what to do.

In the course of Freire’s development of his argument and even in the few paragraphs quoted in this introduction, above, Freire explains a great deal of philosophy, including the subject and the object, and dialectics.

But he does so in a way that is immediately linked to the practical way forward, and this is why Paulo Freire’s writing serves as a sufficient introduction to the indispensable topic of philosophy, in our Basics course.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 1970, Chapter 1.](#)
- A PDF file of the reading text is attached
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here.](#)